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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUGS -- No. 2

Tuesday, March 11, 1930.

A series of radio talks by W. R. M. Wharton, chief, Eastern District, Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered Tuesday mornings at 10 a.m. Eastern Standard Time through Station WJZ, New York and the following other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company: KWK, St. Louis; WREN, Kansas City; KFAB, Lincoln, Neb.; WRC, Washington; WBZA, Boston; KSTP, St. Paul; WSM, Nashville; WAPI, Birmingham; WJAX, Jacksonville, WPTF, Raleigh; and WRVA, Richmond.

The Federal Food and Drugs Act operates in your interest, Mr. and Mrs. Consumer, to protect your food supply, to prevent the sale to you of poisonous or deleterious, of adulterated or misbranded foods and drugs. In the great movement to insure purity and to bring to you honestly labeled food and drug products, the federal government has had the closest cooperation of City and State food and drug control Departments. It has had the whole-hearted and effective cooperation from the reputable manufacturers in the food and drugs trades, but it has not had, complete cooperation of those who are most vitally interested, and that is your good selves - the consuming public. You may well ask, how may we cooperate in insuring honesty of labeling of foods and drugs. The answer is, "read labels," read labels intelligently and insist upon being supplied with the exact commodity you desire to purchase.

The Federal Food and Drugs Act requires every package of food to carry a plain and conspicuous statement of the quantity of the food in the package. You must not be influenced by the apparent size of the package; you must read labels. It frequently happens that what appears to be a large container will actually contain less material than what seems to be a small one. The first injunction to you, therefore, is to read the quantity of contents statement on labels. -- that is, the net weight or net volume statement, determine whether you are getting the quantity you expect to receive, compare this quantity with the quantity offered by other brands, of the same quality, and buy the product which gives the best value for your money.

Labels on foods and drugs have many very interesting statements on them; this you will find if you read labels. And there is a reason: The Federal Food and Drugs Act is strict in its requirements, that labels shall not mislead consumers. And the Supreme Court of the United States has held that this law prohibits even ambiguity when in fact ambiguous labels are misleading. In consequence, to avoid ambiguity, - to make clear and certain to the purchaser the nature of products, labels often carry various statements to show variance from standard or variance from natural, if the products do vary from standard articles or have a composition different from normal.

Look for the label declaration of artificial color or artificial flavor on products containing them. You will find on labels, statements that products are imitations when such is the case, and the ingredients which make them imitations are declared. Now imitation products may be wholesome and perfectly proper as foods, but they are inferior and much cheaper than the genuine.

In order to read labels intelligently, you should know something about the origin and something of the standards of food products. Suppose you asked your grocer for a bottle of Vanilla Extract, and he handed you a bottle labeled Vanillin Extract. What would this mean to you? It would really mean that this grocer was handing you a flavoring material made from Vanillin, a synthetic coal tar product whereas you have asked for a product made from the Vanilla bean. If the Vanillin extract he gives you is artificially colored to look like Vanilla Extract, then it must be labeled as an imitation Vanilla, and the fact that it is artificially colored must be stated, as well as the fact that it contains Vanillin.

Suppose you asked your grocer for a package of noodles, and he passes you a package labeled plain noodles. Do you get what you want, or did you have in mind buying egg noodles? Egg noodles contain 5-1/2% by weight of the solids of whole, sound eggs or egg yolks. Plain noodles contain no egg products. If you are sold plain noodles when you expected to buy egg noodles, you have defrauded yourself by not asking for egg noodles.

Suppose you asked your grocer for a bottle of Mayonnaise, and he substitutes a product labeled merely Salad Dressing. Will you be satisfied with your purchase? Mayonnaise must contain not less than 50% of edible vegetable oil, and it must contain a sufficient quantity of egg yolk to make the sum of the percentages of oil and egg yolk not less than 78%. A product labeled merely as a Salad Dressing, and not labeled Mayonnaise, may contain only an insignificant amount of eggs, or none at all. It may contain a large percentage of starch or other substitute which tend to cheapen it, and therefore it may be very much less valuable as a food product than Mayonnaise Dressing, which you wished to purchase in the first place.

When you, and Mr. and Mrs. Consumer, buy jams, jellies, and preserves, do you read the labels on the packages which are delivered to you? Do you expect to get, in the case of preserves or jam, a product containing at least 45% of fruit of the kind specified, and consisting of nothing but fruit and sugar? If you do expect to get such a product, the package will bear a label declaring that product to be a preserve or jam of the variety of fruit designated. It will not contain less than 45% of fruit. It will contain no more than 55% of sugar. It will not be a compound preserve. It will not be an imitation preserve. It will not be artificially colored or artificially flavored. It will not contain glucose, or added pectin, or added tartaric or citric acid, for if any of these materials were present they would have to be named on the label. If the product is anything else than a pure jam, the label will tell you exactly what it is. Substandard products in this class are always actually more expensive than the genuine. At current prices if you buy substandard preserves containing, say, 25% fruit and the remaining 75% mostly sugar, with water, pectin and acid added, you will pay at a rate which will make the extra sugar cost you at least 300% more than you would have to pay for sugar itself.

Read labels on canned goods. You may find you are getting canned fruit packed in water, when you wanted canned fruit packed in syrup; and canned goods labels will tell you many, many other interesting things.

If a cheese ordinarily made from whole milk is prepared from skim

milk, the label will reveal it. Do you know that the names of varieties of cheese reveal many interesting things among which are, whether the product is made from cows milk or whether from goats milk?

When you see the word Process on a cheese label, it means that the cheese has been modified by emulsification after melting, with a harmless emulsifying agent, and thus changed into a plastic mass.

When you buy Olive Oil, take care to see that it is so labeled. If other kinds of oils are present the label will tell you of the fact. If vinegar is composed in whole or in part of distilled vinegar or commercial acetic acid, the label will tell you the truth. If Ground Mustard contains added mustard bran, the label will say so.

If the powdered cocoa you purchase is labeled Cocoa, it will be a product from which a large percentage of the natural fat has been taken away. If it is labeled Breakfast Cocoa, however, it must contain 25% of natural Cacao fat. But if you are buying chocolate, on the other hand, you will get the natural product containing all of the original fat amounting to not less than 50%. If you observe "Dutch Process" on a chocolate or cocoa label, you will know that the manufacturer has added a harmless alkali carbonate intended to give certain qualities to the product preferred by some users.

In the case of drugs, read labels, my friends. When you buy medicines, if they contain alcohol or morphine or certain other narcotic or habit-forming preparations, the label will tell you this fact, and it will tell you their quantity or proportion.

Labels on drugs are not permitted to make unwarranted claims of therapeutic value. And great progress is being made under the Federal Food and Drugs Act in the elimination from labels on medicines, of false and fraudulent medicinal claims. Let me say, by the way, that the Federal Food and Drugs Act does not cover false and fraudulent advertisements for medicines made in newspapers and magazines, on bill-boards and car-cards, by radio or by other advertising means not directly associated with the package of the medicine itself. It is a wise precaution therefore to compare the label statements themselves with the claims for the product made in advertisements. If the latter are apparently exaggerated it is fair to look upon that particular product with suspicion. Let me say also that the Federal Food and Drugs Act does not control foods or medicines which are manufactured and sold wholly within the borders of a State.

You will find it a very interesting study, Mrs. Housewife, this reading of labels, and I would like to suggest that you form Read Label Committees in your various social clubs. Pledge the members of your clubs to read labels and to apply the principles of economics to the information obtained from label reading. If there could be brought about a widespread movement of intelligent label reading in this country, and the intelligent use of the information obtained from label reading, in the purchase of foods, the consumers of the nation would save millions of dollars per year, and the cause of truthful labeling of foods would be promoted as could be done in no other way.

Let me urge upon you, as a meritorious civic duty and because of your own self-interest, to read labels, to read labels intelligently. Form the habit of label reading, of intelligent scrutiny of labels, and thus do your part toward the cause of honesty of food and drug labels and for your own protection from fraud.